

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

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INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 3993

FROM AMBASSADOR LODGE'S OFFICE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, LE, VT, US

SUBJECT: EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR LEBANON: VATICAN PLEA

REF: ROME 2692

1. ON SEVERAL RECENT OCCASIONS, HIGH VATICAN OFFICIALS HAVE MENTIONED TO US SURPRISE THAT CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS AND USG WERE NOT COOPERATING MORE CLOSELY ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON. THIS VIEW WAS RETIATED TO US DURING CALL ON FATHER HENRI DE RIEDMATTEN ON MARCH 10. (DE RIEDMATTEN IS SECRETARY OF PONTIFICAL COUNCIL "COR UNUM," VATICAN'S COORDINATING BODY FOR WORLDWIDE CHARITABLE ASSISTANCE. HE MADE AN ON-THE-SPOT ASSESSMENT OF LEBANON FOR VATICAN IN EARLY FEBRUARY (REFTEL).). DE RIEDMATTEN MADE A PLEA FOR US PL 480 TITLE II ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON THROUGH PRIVATE AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS IN FOLLOWING TERMS:

2. AN EMERGENCY FOOD AID PROGRAM WAS CRITICALLY NECESSARY FOR LEBANON. "COR UNUM" ESTIMATES THAT SOME 400,000 PEOPLE WERE IN NEED OF FOOD AND SOME 200,000 MUST BE REACHED IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE. OF THE 400,000 PEOPLE, ABOUT 300,000 ARE CHRISTIANS WHO FLED THEIR
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HOMES AND WHO WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RETURN UNTIL A REHABILITATION

PROGRAM TAKES EFFECT. HE SAID THAT AMONG THE REMAINDER WERE BOTH CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS, AND THAT CARITAS DID NOT DISCRIMINATE IN DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE MENTIONED THAT CARITAS WOULD BE OPERATING IN SOME "MIXED" VILLAGES AS WELL AS IN DRUZE MOSLEM AREAS WHERE CHRISTIANS WERE GIVEN REFUGE. HE FURTHER STATED THAT THE FOOD SITUATION HAD CHANGED SUBSTANTIALLY FROM WHAT IT WAS LAST OCTOBER: FOOD RESERVES WERE NOW NEARLY EXHAUSTED, AND WHAT REMAINED IS MADE AVAILABLE ONLY AT VERY HIGH PRICES. HE THOUGHT THAT NEXT THREE MONTHS WOULD CONSTITUTE A CRUCIAL PERIOD FOR MOUNTING SUCH A PROGRAM AND HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT USG WOULD AUTHORIZE FOOD SUPPLIES TO LEBANON THROUGH PRIVATE AGENCIES LIKE CARITAS AND PROTESTANT CHURCH'S WORLD SERVICES ORGANIZATION. CARITAS, HE SAID, HAD EXPERTISE IN LEBANON TO MOUNT EFFORT QUICKLY AND HE UNDERSTOOD THAT CRS WAS WILLING TO COOPERATE PROMPTLY WITH USG.

3. COMMENT: FATHER DE RIEDMATTEN WAS NOT AWARE (WE DID NOT REVEAL OUR KNOWLEDGE) OF RECOMMENDATION IN EMBASSY BEIRUT'S 2026 FOR A "MODEST GESTURE" IN PL 480 TITLE II AREA. THE ARGUMENTS PRESENTED TO US BY DE RIEDMATTEN REGARDING URGENT HUMANITARIAN NEED FOR FOOD, THE EXISTING CAPABILITIES OF CARITAS LEBANON, THE PROMPT WILLINGNESS OF AMERICAN CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES TO ASSIST IN EFFORT AND ASSURANCES THAT FOOD RELIEF WOULD BE DISTRIBUTED WITHOUT CONFESSIONAL DISCRIMINATION (APPARENTLY FEASIBLE IN CERTAIN MIXED VILLAGES) SUPPORT EMBASSY BEIRUT'S RECOMMENDATION. OUR CONVERSATIONS INDICATE THAT VATICAN IS NOT INSENSITIVE TO CIRCUMSTANCES IN LEBANON WHICH COMPEL USG TO BE PRUDENT IN THE CHOICE OF INSTRUMENTS FOR CHANNELLING ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON. MOREOVER, IT DOES NOT WISH THAT CARITAS BE EXCLUSIVE INSTRUMENT AND, IN FACT, WELCOMES PARTICIPATION OF OTHER CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS IN EFFORT PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN AND REHABILITATION ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON. WE WOULD APPRECIATE BEING INFORMED OF DEPARTMENT'S DECISION ON THIS MATTER. VOLPE

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